

Discover Bible Studies

#15: The Secret to Happiness

In 1943, Japanese occupation forces ordered hundreds of American and European "enemy nationals" to an internment camp in China's Shantung Province. They had to endure months of boredom, frustration, overcrowding, and fear. Personalities clashed, tempers flared. Petty squabbles multiplied.

But one man was described by an internee as "without a doubt the person most in demand and most respected and loved in camp"-Eric Liddell, a missionary from Scotland.

A Russian prostitute in camp would later recall that Liddell was the only man who'd ever done anything for her without wanting to be repaid in kind. When she first came into camp, alone and snubbed, he put up some shelves for her.

Another internee recalled, "He had a gentle, humorous way of soothing ruffled tempers."

At one angry meeting of the internees, everybody was demanding that someone else do something about the restless teenagers who were getting into trouble. Liddell came up with a solution. He organized sports, crafts, and classes for the kids, and began spending his evenings with them.

Liddell had won fame and glory at the 1924 Olympics, taking a gold medal in the 400 meters race. But in that cramped compound he showed himself a winner in the Christian race as well, earning the admiration of the worldliest internees.

What made him so special? You could have discovered his secret at 6 a.m. each morning. That's when he tiptoed quietly past sleeping companions, settled down at a table, and lit a small lamp to illuminate his notebook and Bible. Eric Liddell sought grace and strength each day in the riches of God's Word.

1. THE GUIDEBOOK TO THE CHRISTIAN LIFESTYLE

The Bible was written as a guidebook for the Christian. It is full of stories of real people like us who have experienced the same challenges we face every day. Getting to know these Bible characters their joys and sorrows, their problems and opportunities-helps us mature as Christians.

The psalmist David pictures our daily dependence on the Word of God by comparing it to a flashlight [torchlight]:

"Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

-Psalm 119:105. (Unless otherwise noted, all Scriptural texts in the DISCOVER guides are from the New International Version of the Bible [NIV].)

The illumination we get each day from the Bible makes clear the qualities we need in our lives and the principles of spiritual growth. Above all, the Bible presents us with Jesus, the Light of the World. Life only makes sense when Jesus is shining on it.

2. A TRANSFORMING FRIENDSHIP

Christ wants the Bible to be as real to you as a personal letter from a close friend.

"I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you." -John 15:15.

Jesus wants the very best for us. His Word brings us into God's inner circle: those He confides in and personally instructs.

"I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace." -John 16:33.

In order to experience this peace, this secure relationship with Christ, we need to read the letters He sends us. That's what the Bible is: correspondence from heaven. Don't leave those letters unopened. The transforming message you need is in the Word.

Here is one typical testimony about the Bible's impact: "I needed help, and I found it in Jesus. Every want was supplied, the hunger of my soul was satisfied; the Bible is to me the revelation of Christ. I believe in Jesus because He is to me a divine Saviour. I believe the Bible because I have found it to be the voice of God to my soul."-The Ministry of Healing, p. 461.

3. GUIDELINES FOR LIVING IN THE BIBLE AND THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

A brief look at the Ten Commandments will help us understand why they and the Bible are an indispensable basis for right living.

The Commandments naturally fall into two divisions. The first four define our relationship to God, and the last six define our relationship to other people. They are found in Exodus 20:3-17.

The first two commandments outline our relationship to God and to His worship.

- I. "You shall have no other gods before me."
- II. "You shall not make for yourself an idol . . . You shall not bow down to them or worship them. . . ."

The 3rd and 4th commandments sketch our relationship to God's name and to His holy day.

III. "You shall not misuse the name of the LORD your God . . . "

IV. "Remember the Sabbath day by keeping it holy. Six days you shall labour and do all your work, but the seventh day is a Sabbath to the LORD your God. . . . "

Commandments 5 and 7 safeguard family bonds.

V. "Honour your father and your mother . . . "

VII. "You shall not commit adultery."

Commandments 6, 8, 9, and 10 protect us in social relationships.

VI. "You shall not murder."

VIII. "You shall not steal."

IX. "You shall not give false testimony against your neighbour."

X. "You shall not covet your neighbour's house. You shall not covet your neighbour's wife . . . or anything that belongs to your neighbour."

The Ten Commandments define our relationship both to God and to other people. They are the guideposts of a Christian lifestyle.

4. **WHAT JESUS SAID ABOUT THE TEN COMMANDMENTS**

One day as Jesus was teaching, an enthusiastic young man hurried up to Him and asked, "Teacher, what good thing must I do to get eternal life?" (Matthew 19:16). Christ could see that he was wrestling with a money problem and advised him to get rid of his possessions and "obey the commandments" (verse 17).

The young man tried to sidestep Christ's diagnosis of his problem by asking which commandments He was talking about. Jesus listed several of the Ten Commandments

(Verses 18, 19).

Finally, the "rich young ruler" turned and walked away sadly (verses 20-22). He could give mental assent to the Ten Commandments, but he couldn't obey the spirit of the law by abandoning his selfish way of life.

The Ten Commandments show us the boundaries within which healthy relationships, with God and each other, can grow. Jesus pointed to obedience as the way to real joy:

"If you OBEY MY COMMANDS, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love. I HAVE TOLD YOU THIS SO that my joy may be in you and THAT YOUR JOY MAY BE COMPLETE." -John 15:10, 11.

5. GUIDE TO A HAPPY LIFE

The book of Ecclesiastes is a report of Solomon's search for happiness. He records his quest for happiness in the riches of the world: magnificent houses, productive vineyards, beautiful gardens, and orchards of luscious fruit. He multiplied servants. He found himself surrounded with every material thing a person could desire. But happiness eluded him, and he wrote:

"When I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind." -Ecclesiastes 2:11.

Solomon then turned to searching out the pleasures of this world in hope of finding happiness. He was taken in by wine, women, and song. His conclusion:

"Meaningless! Meaningless! . . . Everything is meaningless!" -Ecclesiastes 12:8.

Solomon had once tasted and seen that the Lord is good. As he compared his early life of obedience to God with his reckless chase for happiness in the things of sin, his verdict:

"Here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." -Ecclesiastes 12:13.

Solomon felt he could find a shortcut to happiness in a wild life. Toward the close of his life, he was man enough to admit his error. To save others from the same error, he wrote,

"He that keepeth the law, happy is he." -Proverbs 29:18, KJV.

6. THE TEN COMMANDMENTS AN INDISPENSABLE NEW TESTAMENT GUIDE

In the New Testament, James testified:

"For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. For he who said, 'Do not commit adultery,' also said, 'Do not murder.' If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom." -James 2:10-12.

Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist preacher of the past century, declared: "The law of God is divine law-holy, heavenly, perfect. . . . There is not a command too many; there is not one too few, but it is so incomparable that its perfection is proof of its divinity."

John Wesley, one of the founders of the Methodist church, wrote this about the enduring nature of the law: "The moral law contained in Ten Commandments . . . He [Christ] did not take away. . . .

Every part of this law must remain in force upon all mankind and in all ages." -Sermons, vol. I, pp. 221, 222.

Billy Graham, the world's most respected evangelical evangelist, regards the Ten Commandments so highly that he has written an entire book about their importance to the Christian.

7. POWER TO OBEY

The Bible and the Ten Commandments are an unchangeable, indispensable, perfect guide to happy living. Yet hearts are still in conflict. One woman expressed it like this: "I believe the Ten Commandments are binding, I am certain that keeping them leads to happiness. I have tried my very best to keep them, but I just can't do it. I'm beginning to believe that no one else can."

The tendency of the natural person is to try to live a life of obedience to God's commands. But in answer to such trying, over and over again from within the blackened heart of a person comes the frustrated response, "I can't obey!" Why? Because:

"The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so." - Romans 8:7.

What is the purpose of the Ten Commandment law?

"Through the law we become conscious of sin."-Romans 3:20.

The function of the law is to lead us to utter realization that we are hopelessly lost sinners in need of a Saviour.

"The law was put in charge to lead us to Christ that we might be justified by faith." - Galatians 3:24.

Jesus is the answer! Once we are at Jesus' feet in absolute helplessness, by faith we can receive forgiveness for our sins and power from Him to obey His commandments.

8. LOVING OBEDIENCE TO THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

Jesus tells us that obedience is the result of love:

"If you love me, you will obey what I command."-John 14:15.

If we love God, we will obey the first four commandments which define our relationship to God; and if we love people, we will obey the last six which define our relationship with others.

The person who tramples on the Ten Commandments sins:

"Everyone who sins breaks the law; in fact, sin is lawlessness." -1 John 3:4.

But thank God, we have a Saviour who came to this world and died, was resurrected, and now lives for one purpose:

"But you know that He appeared SO THAT HE MIGHT TAKE AWAY OUR SINS." -Verse 5.

Our Saviour forgives and removes our sinfulness (1 John 1:9). He then promises to give us His love to love with-the great antidote to a life of selfishness and sin:

"GOD HAS Poured OUT HIS LOVE IN OUR HEARTS by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us." -Romans 5:5.

We have no innate ability to keep God's law. God's love "poured out . . . in our hearts" is our only hope.

9. GOD'S GRACE AND OBEDIENCE TO THE LAW

Salvation is a gift. We cannot earn it. We can only accept it by faith. We receive justification (right standing with God) as a gift, solely through faith because of God's grace.

"For it is BY GRACE YOU HAVE BEEN SAVED, through FAITH-and this not from yourselves, it is THE GIFT OF GOD-not by works, so that no one can boast." -Ephesians 2:8.

We cannot keep the commandments by our own works-by trying. We cannot keep the commandments to be saved. But when we come to Jesus in faith and submission and are saved, his love fills our hearts. As a result of this divine grace and acceptance, we desire to follow Him and obey Him through the power of His love in our hearts (Romans 5:5).

Paul stresses the futility of human effort and indicates that we are not under the law as a way of salvation, but "under grace."

"Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? By no means!" -Romans 6:15.

Why? Because a heart motivated by love produces a life of loving obedience! (Romans 13:10). To love Christ is to obey Him:

"Whoever has my commands and obeys them, he is the one who loves me." -John 14:21.

Eric Liddell demonstrated that, even in the worst of circumstances, the believer who is plugged into God's power can live a contented, obedient life. Liddell demonstrated a winsome grace in a time of stress and fear. His love relationship with Christ energized him with the Holy Spirit, and enabled Him to meet "the righteous requirements of the law" (Romans 8:1-4). A love relationship with the crucified and risen Saviour can produce that quality of life.

Have you discovered this secret for yourself? Jesus' love for you caused Him to give His life for your sin. He offers to empower all your relationships with His love and to "equip you with everything good for doing his will" (Hebrews 13:21). What is your response?

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